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To : Mr. Keichi Katayama
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G7 Personal Representative to the Prime Minister

Role of Syrian Civil Society in Peace Process

The issue of immigration and refugees has continuously held a central position in agenda of G7 meetings at Elmau, Ise Shima and elsewhere. In particular, the Syrian problem has reached serious proportions. Even now in the seventh year since the breakout of unrest, it is far from showing any signs of a settlement. On the contrary, the situation is getting more and more chaotic. Nowadays, it is called the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. In order to solve the root cause of this problem, there is a strong desire for G7 initiatives.

While European countries concentrate on refugee problems, the U.S. and Russia focus on military operations against the Islamic state and Turkey centers on the Kurdish issue. Every actor responds to the Syrian crisis from their respective priorities. Under these circumstances, in peace negotiations in Geneva and Astana, the voices of Syrian civilians have been ignored, even though they are directly involved and they suffer from the conflict. However, there would be no sustainable peace or development for Syria without considering the role of citizens who make Syrian society. Even if the Syrian crisis could be superficially ended by political compromises among power holders or military intervention, a sustainable peace cannot be achieved in Syria without the active participation of Syrian citizens.

Today, many actors such as UN agencies, think tanks and NGOs both inside and outside of Syria are launching studies and programs to visualize how Syria should be in future. The UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has initiated a "Future of Syria" program, a blueprint for a Syrian reconstruction process that is being made by Syrian technocrats who were engaged in administrative tasks long before the Syria crisis broke out. On the other hand, the Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR), a Syrian think tank, intends to assure a space for dialogues among UN agencies, experts, NGOs and all people concerned with the development of Syria in the future.

The voices of Syrian citizens should be reflected in the peace process in order to realize a sustainable peace for Syria. We, the Network for Peace in Syria, urge the Japanese government to proactively make appeals to international society to support initiatives such as ESCWA and SCPR at the G7 summit.

Last February we organized an international symposium "Towards Feasible and Effective Approaches to the Syrian Crisis by Academia and NGOs in Japan" in Tokyo. Participants from Syrian civil society such as the representative from SCPR agreed with the idea that international society should support the role of Syrian civil society in the conduct of national and grassroots dialogue, in the rebuilding trust between individuals and communities, and in the making of a sustainable peace.